

## **De-territorializing Experiences: Translating Between Indian and Brazilian Postcolonial Languages**

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### **I.**

I'm neither a translator by profession nor, from my academic background, a specialist in linguistics or related subjects. I'm basically a student and a teacher of religious studies, philosophy and the social sciences, whose various exchanges and permutations, within a particular set of personal circumstances, landed me, among others, in the discipline commonly described as 'cultural studies'. Before long, I was drawn into an intense game of communication between Indian and Brazilian cultures, and what was once a spontaneous tendency acquired, over the course of time, the complementary character of a planned design. Accordingly, my academic projects found themselves gradually 'contaminated' by those personal circumstances. Successive teaching assignments both in India and Brazil have been consistently marked by unavoidable efforts to 'translate' one culture into another and vice-versa. Therefore, both personally and academically, cultural translation, more than merely a supplementary undertaking, has been an imperative at the core of my being. Linguistically, a sustained dialogue has developed, in the form of systematic translations and publications, between Brazilian Portuguese, on the one hand, and Indian languages such as Sanskrit, Hindi and Konkani, on the other.

It's against this backdrop of academic interdisciplinarity – and a multicultural personal profile that frequently struggles to make up for a lack of technical abilities – that I would like to advance some tentative and rather inquisitive considerations on Translation Studies in general and on the specific translation exercise I'm involved with. Accordingly, I'll concentrate my remarks on the agency of a translator as a 'cultural bridge' rather than on the nitty-gritties of the specific routines of translation work.

Translations of any sort from one language into another belong to the broad frame of human communication, and more specifically of cul-

tural dialogue. In fact, each and every intercultural communication process implies the conversion of a meaningful message originally inscribed in a particular system – mental, visual or linguistic – into another system, attempting to transmit that message to individuals familiar with the latter. The task of linguistic translation constitutes, precisely, one of its most important modalities: it enables communication between cultures by linking two (or more) languages in such a manner that a message originally enunciated in one language is ultimately received in another. If the original enunciation of the message is grounded in orality – i.e., in immediate linguistic performances – we have an oral interpretation; if, on the other hand, it is grounded in textuality – i.e., in mediate linguistic performances – we have a textual translation. In any case, what enables cultural dialogue is the translator's operative magic of 'transubstantiation' of messages as a hermeneutical task that ensures continuity of meaning and existential transformation.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Recent developments in Translation Studies have brought into the limelight the paramount role of the translator as a cultural mediator (Buffagni/Garzelli/Zanotti 2011). The so-called 'cultural turn' pioneered by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere pointed to the fact that "neither the word, nor the text, but the culture becomes the operational 'unit' of translation" (Bassnett/Lefevere 1990: 8). Lawrence Venuti, on the other hand, fought decisively "against the translator's invisibility" and the unjustified importance given to the "original text" and the "domesticating practices", all part of political projects of cultural domination (Venuti 1995: 39). Both these trends have been highly influential in postcolonial critique. In the Indian context, we could mention Tejaswini Niranjana's idea of translation as a political action that could either result in arbitrary constructions of an exotic 'other' or, conversely, become an instrument for the latter's resistance and transformation (Niranjana 1992). In the Brazilian context, we could mention Haroldo de Campos's postulation of translation as a foundational process of 'trans-creation'. By doing so, Campos calls for a major interventionist role to be played by the translator as a 'cannibal' agent, "a monster that rebels against the father, an author that rebels against the invisibility of his own presence as co-author" (Magalhães 1998: 146). Still, the relevance of the translator's intervention is not exhausted by the postcolonial critique and its genealogical task of unveiling underlying political interests and motivations. More than a 'political action', I assume that translation is, above all, an 'existential' action to be understood in line with Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*). Accordingly, the act of translation constitutes and projects a specific hermeneutical experience and, as such, a process totally "immersed" in language, closely related to "man's image of the world as expressed in a given language" (Piecychna 2012: 161). The "fusion of horizons" that underscores the possibility of translation as an hermeneutical experience involves the inevitable encounter of the translator's original horizon/culture with the translated text's original horizon/culture. One's horizon/culture stands here neither as a boundary that encloses one, nor as a boundary that needs to be crossed beyond. In fact, says Vessey, "to know what lies beyond an horizon doesn't require crossing it, it simply requires moving toward the horizon, or more aptly, moving to higher ground so the previous horizon is included in a broader horizon. Our intellectual horizons change whenever we learn something

Translation as an hermeneutical task, ensuring the continuity of meaning and existential transformation, conforms adequately to Gadamer's notion of a "fusion of horizons" (see footnote 1). It implies that the translator's 'horizontal' dynamics of mediation between cultures corresponds, existentially, to the translator's – and eventually the reader's – 'vertical' dynamics of mediation between a lower and a higher level – or between a superficial and a deeper level – of understanding of his/her world and, more specifically, of his/her being-in-the-world. This 'spiritual' dimension lies behind the fact that, in several traditions, the role and prestige of a translator as a mediator between cultures is modelled after divine or semi-divine characters who fulfil the vital role of mediating between different cosmic realms. That is the case of the Indian *agni* (fire) who 'translates' the food presented by human beings in ritual sacrifices into matter accessible to other gods;<sup>2</sup> similar is the role of the Greek Hermes and the Afro-Brazilian Exu. In all cases, the power of mediation resides fundamentally in the mediator's epistemological agency as a knower of different cosmic realms (earth, heaven and hell). If we substitute cosmic realms for human cultures, we could say that the translating power of the translator resides in his/her plurivalent wisdom, or, in other words, his/her 'cultural plurivalence'.

To sustain the possibility of communication/translation across cultures and the paramount role of the translator's intervention, one should set aside modern semiotic presumptions which render translation a mechanical enterprise of signic transpositions (decodification/recodification) and epiphenomenal meanings, as well as the cultural relativism of post-modern

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new or when we weigh differently what we already know, and these changes do not require crossing beyond the limits of our understanding" (Vessey 2014). In other words, Gadamer's hermeneutics of translation involves a radical situation in which one's recognition of the finitude of one's perspective in dialogue paradoxically opens itself up to one's experiencing the truth of "a higher universality" (Gadamer 1991: 305). The leap towards that 'higher universality', one without which no communication is ever possible, is precisely the translator's major accomplishment, a movement of detachment and sacrifice that opens one – the translator and eventually the reader – towards the other and impels one to go beyond the confinements of the ego.

- 2 While pointing to another mythical character, namely, the sage Narada, Lachman Khubchandani remarks: "Indian mythology projects this dynamics (the role of a translator) through the celebrated character of Narada, who is admired for his 'tempering' messages which are perceived as 'relevant' to the task of ferrying passengers across the cosmic universe. Charged with a positive mission, Narada's 'interventionist' approach, in transmitting the desired message to the other end, the target, can be viewed as a fine-tuning of the message, highlighting a subjective input in the role of an interpreter in an intercultural setting" (Khubchandani 2002: 46).

fashion which renders translation an impossible proposition. The assumption here is that a fundamental common ground, historically and therefore dynamically expressed, informs the diversity of the various contemporary linguistic systems involved.

A recurrent image is that of a series of well-fortified buildings/cultures whose ground floor is part of large hall shared by all the buildings. Attempts at communicating through the walls of upper floors from one building to another, no matter the pitch or intensity of the screams, are necessarily bound to fail. The only solution is to descend to the common hall, a painful experience of self-detachment, de-identification and de-territorialisation, which can't possibly occur, simultaneously, across the entire residency of a given building/culture in which existential compulsions are the norm and the organizational economy of collective survival should prevail. That's where the exceptional role of translators – as cultural plurivalent/'hybrid'<sup>3</sup> characters who go in between buildings/cultures – becomes decisive.

Against a backdrop of inter-cultural dialogues, essentially marked by historical and geopolitical asymmetries of power, the translator derives from his/her privileged location in the 'common hall', i.e., from his/her knowledge of the inter-communicating cultures, the power to provoke sporadic and yet momentous events wherein asymmetries stand balanced. Translations that enrich the target culture by transferring traditions, by adding ideas and horizons, have that qualitative mark of medium-term compromises, of self-justifying acts of communication, i.e., acts that communicate instead of manipulate meanings. For the translator, what essentially enables his constructive intervention, more than technical expertise, is an underlying 'existential cause', a matter of life and death: the balancing exercise is ultimately the balancing of his own 'plurivalence'. Here lies, in my opinion, the pragmatism as well as the ethics that underscores the task of translation as an agency of cultural dialogue.

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3 I use this word to evoke the sense of a plurality of facets under a unifying and dynamic principle of consciousness, rather than a Frankensteinian or loose superposition of identities.

## II.

The enormous potential of acts of translation to play a vital role in inter-cultural encounters coexists, side by side, with the enormous and clear danger of becoming a manipulative tool in power struggles. Whenever the act of cultural balancing fails, because of either (i) ignorance/defective knowledge of the inter-communicating cultures or (ii) a presumptuous idea of the cultural superiority of one of them, translation ends up being either a miscommunication or a false dialogue, respectively. Mythological and religious traditions have often associated this failure of communication between cosmic realms with demonic designs, a kind of 'linguistic Luciferism', or in Indian terms, a 'linguistic Ravanism'.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing illustrates better the harmful consequences of resorting to translation processes as manipulative weapons than the colonial enterprises of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, which distinctively marked contemporary dealings between cultures and languages all over the world. Asymmetric cultural exchanges were certainly nothing new in the history of mankind. What was new in the project of modernity/coloniality was the extent to which asymmetry stop swinging from pole to pole and found itself crystallised, almost petrified in one of them, so-called 'western civilisation'. Modernity/coloniality inaugurated an unprecedented phase of unilateralist and static asymmetry by virtue of which most cultures of the globe were asked to consent (through physical coercion and more efficiently, through dominant ideologies and the formation of a national elite) to a naturalised world system of classification which would lend them a quasi-irremediable subaltern and peripheral hierarchical role. The unique character of western cultural unilateralism found definitive expression in a self-assumed universalism ably promoted by the Enlightenment and aptly consolidated through the development of natural and social sciences. It was not enough to postulate superiority; inferiority had to be proved and, more generously, inferiority had to be rescued through the prophylactics of western unilateral-universalism.

'Coloniality of power', as some authors have labelled European unilateral asymmetry, was largely exercised through the utilisation of language as a manipulative rather than a communicative instrument (Mignolo 2000:

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<sup>4</sup> A reference to the primary antagonist character to the god Rāma in the ancient Indian epic of Rāmāyaṇa.

262-263). The well-known centre-periphery model, which is primarily intended to describe the colonial and neo-colonial world system of asymmetric socio-economic development, applies, with equal efficiency, to underlying cultural processes. A similar disruptive relationship prevailed between the 'central' colonial languages, namely Portuguese, Spanish, German, Dutch, French and most prominently English, and the 'peripheral' colonised languages, spread throughout the rest of the world in the Americas, Africa and Asia. The disciplinary and controlling power acquired by the former over the latter was largely enhanced by alleged scientific developments in linguistics and other related areas. Basic norms that lent prestige and superiority to written textual expressions in Europe ensured the establishment of 'universal' linguistic principles, according to which formal structures were able to dictate meanings and rule over other historical/cultural/hermeneutic contexts and traditions.

As the critique of Orientalism has abundantly shown, translations between western and non-western languages emerged as a foremost 'philological' tool to access juridically and therapeutically subaltern cultures (Said 1990: 132-173). Where written/textual evidence did not exist, as was the case in large areas of today's Latin America and Africa, the task was either to dismiss (i.e., to eliminate) native languages altogether or to invent textual expressions through an arbitrary recording of oral traditions. That's how Portuguese and Spanish ended up becoming, in a seemingly exclusive or monolingualistic fashion, the language of the colonised in large parts of Latin America, as in the case of Brazil. Where textual evidences did exist, as in the case of India, the task was first to critically establish 'reliable' reception processes which could conceivably be dissociated from larger traditional multicultural, oral/performative contexts and, second, to submit them to the disciplinary action of the European linguistic/ideological pseudo-universalist viewpoint. Max Müller's (1823-1900) dismissive comments on the Brāhmaṇa(s)<sup>5</sup> – he describes them as a "set of meaningless statements" (Müller 1926 [1859]: 204) – clearly illustrate this procedure. More than failing to understand that written ritual instructions can only acquire meaning and purpose within the actual performance of the ritual, Max Müller was clearly uninterested in any type of cultural dialogue: his

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5 Ancient Sanskrit texts dealing with ritual performances. They constitute one of the two main sections of the Vedas, the other being the *Upaniṣad(s)*. Max Müller's *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* was first published in London in 1859.

adamant refusal to ever visit India, or to accept the existence of any hermeneutic continuity between ancient and modern India, can leave no doubt in anyone's mind about the manipulating role of his philological intervention.

Corrective or prophylactic translations of (de-contextualised) written texts had manipulation rather than communication in view: the translator's membership in a 'superior' culture rendered the idea of a communicatory translation as something absolutely unnecessary, a complete waste of time. This crude form of linguistic asymmetry found due expression not only in the large quantity of European translations and the teaching of European languages, especially English, to subaltern subjects, but also, and perhaps more lastingly, in its normative legacy in the form of grammatical rules, lexicological principles and other linguistic modalities of disciplinary control. A contemporary consequence of that legacy in several regions of the former colonial world, such as India, is a situation of bilingualism or diglossia – in some regions, even trilingualism or triglossia – distinctively marked by the active presence of English in many influential spheres of quotidian life.<sup>6</sup> All in all, the centre-periphery model of colonial linguistic domination partially succeeded in bringing into the colonised world two controversial principles: (1) the superiority of written forms over oral expressions, which pushed for the confinement of translation processes to textual translations; and (2) the standard model of monolithic and homogenous cultures fashioned according to the idea of the European nation-state.

Contemporary practices of systematic translation in peripheral regions cannot but reflect the developments that followed colonial predicaments. They are, in other words, postcolonial events. As mentioned earlier, my personal experience relates two distinct postcolonial realities: the Asian reality of the Indian subcontinent and the Latin American reality of Brazil. Time and again, I'm faced with the following question: does the postcolonial factor play any significant role in enhancing communicability between the two cultures, which had no significant colonial exchanges and still fewer pre-colonial affinities?

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<sup>6</sup> It's important to note that, in the Indian case, multiglossia has a long history on the subcontinent, prior to the emergence of British imperialism. The novelty lies in the contemporary influential presence of English.

**III.**

Let's briefly look at the postcolonial cultural and linguistic realities of both regions. What stand out, *prima facie*, are considerable differences. Firstly, Brazil is a cultural entity born as a "side-effect" of the colonial enterprise – we shall call it a 'new culture' – whereas India is a cultural entity which precedes the colonial enterprise – we shall call it an 'ancient culture'. Thus, the colonial event is said to be 'constitutive' in the case of Brazil and 'transformative' in the case of India. Second, the postcolonial language of Brazil is a single one and a direct legacy of the European colonisers, namely Portuguese; whereas the postcolonial languages of India are plural and their birth precedes the colonial event. There is, of course a colonial legacy: the English language, which co-exists in several spheres in a situation of bi-lingualism or even tri-lingualism. Thirdly, there are nuanced differences between the colonial systems involved: Brazil was colonised by a pre-industrial and pre-Enlightenment colonial power; whereas India was colonised by an industrialised and post-Enlightenment master. Fourthly, there is a widespread perception that Brazil and India belong/belonged to different cultural/geopolitical areas as independent nations: Brazil is part of western civilisation, whereas India is part of the great family of 'oriental/Asian' civilisations; Brazil was part of the US bloc during the Cold War period, whereas India was part of the Soviet Union bloc (Loundo 2003b: 117-118).

Could the opposing pairs of factual realities and recurrent perceptions – i.e. the new versus the ancient culture, the colonial-based language versus the pre-colonial-based languages, the west versus the east and capitalism versus socialism – be actual evidence of a real distance? I definitely think otherwise. As far as the perceptions go, I think the critique of both Orientalism and Occidentalism has already removed several masks: Sanskrit's affiliation to the large family of European languages significantly shatters the myth of 'oriental India' and the African and Amerindian foundations of Brazilian cultures significantly shatter the myth of 'occidental Brazil'. As far as the alleged factual realities go, one has to verify their effective meaning and implications by submitting them to the wider context of colonial and post-independence local strategies of resistance. The idea of 'postcolonial realities', in particular, suggests a peculiar connection between colonial imposition and local resistance: one whereby the latter, far from implying a (somewhat impossible) rejection of uninvited elements, involves a gradual



semantic reorientation of their original designs. That's what Brazilian literary critics have, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, called the 'anthropophagy' of the 'other', a cultural metaphor inspired by the actual practices of certain indigenous tribes of pre-Colombian Latin America. The ritual act of devouring the other or, in symbolical terms, the act of incorporating the other's qualities, constitutes a legitimate and, at the same time, dialogical form of appropriation: it re-creates adventitious elements so as to suit a given identity and, at the same, entrusts the latter with a dynamic, porous and flexible character (de Andrade 1972: 11-19).

An anthropophagous imagination combining both resistance and change marks the historical dynamics of postcolonial processes in Latin America and India. And while specific strategies may vary as widely as the changing circumstances, the anthropophagous agents seem equally empowered by two major trans-rationalistic weapons: (1) a foundational 'multiculturality' and (2) a 'linguistic orality/performability'.

India's "non-uniform unity" guided by the polysemic concept of *dharma* rests on a principle of 'complementarity of differences' that ensures the preservation of those same differences as organically integrated sub-cultures. Perhaps a major philosophical foundation is represented by the *advaita* (non-dualism) notion of the Vedānta school of the *Upaniṣad(s)*, which postulates a unicity that nourishes and sustains, at the ontological level, the plastic multiplicity of the one's experiences. The mediating role of imagination becomes manifest through the ritual presentation/profusion of a plethora of deities that compete for the preference of the various social segments in a spirit of coexistence and sufficiency: they are instrument, not destiny. There is no room here for imaginary reification or dogma. The main instrumental character of this religious "inclusiveness" – as Paul Hacker (1983) called it – provides the model of the relative autonomy-preserving insertion of adventitious elements which originated from, among others, the cultural encounters with Islamic and Christian spaces.

An autonomy-preserving structure did not, particularly, favour ethnic miscegenation. It favoured, above all, a dialogical exchange of ideas, values, dogmata, rituals and iconography, that strengthened the dynamic continuity of existing identities as well as their interdependence and solidarity. The creation of new subcultural segmentations has been complexly superimposed upon pre-existent ones, generating internally diversified Islamic and Christian communities within an already amply diversified

Hindu component. Consequently, there can't be any real cultural homogeneity behind the equivocal terms of either 'Indian-ness' or 'Hinduism'. The construction of a nationalist ideology that additionally incorporates the principle of modern individuality as a necessary requirement for the political centralisation that followed the post-independence period, has been a long process. It seems correct to state, with Partha Chatterjee, that nationalism declared the 'spiritual domain' as a re-inventive, imaginative and creative faculty that functions, throughout the history of the subcontinent, as a point of convergence of a plurality of Indian cultural formations (Chatterjee 1994: 6).

While the case of India is quite obvious as an explicit, transparent and relatively guilt-free perspective, the 'multiculturality' and 'linguistic orality' of "occidental" Brazil demands elaboration, in view of the above-mentioned constitutive character of the colonial enterprise and the inheritance of the Portuguese language. The vital agency of Portuguese in the formation of Brazil was not only unintentional but also involved the participation of a multitude of other cultural formations of non-European origin, which far exceeded, in terms of numbers, the Portuguese migratory contingents. As a result, Brazil emerged as a new cultural synthesis with a marked regional heterogeneity. As a (multi)cultural novelty that transcended Europeans, Amerindians and Africans and, at the same time, incorporated them all, the birth of Brazil was itself an effective and viable form of resistance to and subversion of the colonial enterprise.

The inherited Portuguese language went through a process of re-birth, whereby structures and meanings were remade, while incorporating syntactical, semantic and prosodic elements from various Amerindian and African languages – basically oral traditions. As a consequence, it is quite appropriate to say that Brazilian Portuguese constitutes, in its own right, a real postcolonial, non-European, sociological reality. It stands as ample evidence that, under specific circumstances, the language of the coloniser may well become an effective tool of cultural resistance in the hands of the colonised. Interestingly, the same could perhaps be said of the English language in India for its role in the freedom struggle movement, its recurrent utilisation in academic and literary circles and its function as a linkage among Indian languages. At the same time, the destiny of Brazilian-proliferated and -subverted Christianity is another outstanding example of a new postcolonial sociological reality. In this connection, the words of Oswald de Andrade, the famous Brazilian modernist writer and 'cultural

anthropophagite', fit remarkably well: "We were never catechized... We made Christ be born in [Salvador da] Bahia"<sup>7</sup> (de Andrade 1972: 11-12). In sum, both Brazilian Portuguese language and Brazilian multifaceted Christianity are terminological designations that involve a much larger narrative: there are many languages in Brazilian Portuguese and many religions in Brazilian Christianity.

If our assessment is correct, foundational 'multiculturality' and 'linguistic orality' as instrumental anthropophagous forms of cultural resistance are to be reckoned as important features of the contemporary historical circumstances that inform the above mentioned "common ground" or "common hall" that ensures cultural translatability. They allow for the transformation of the once imposing concepts of European origin into linguistic platforms wherein active re-creations are enacted and pseudo-universalist jurisdictions are dropped. In short, they entrust cultural and linguistic territorialities of both Brazil and India with a 'dynamics of cultural inclusion' and a 'dynamics of imagination' which operate as a fundamental structure to articulate diversities and to ensure plasticity and iconographic profusion (Loundo 2003b: 118-121).

Foundational multiculturalism, both in its Brazilian version as individualised phenomena and in its Indian version as community interaction phenomena, favours a creative pulverisation of nation-state-building projects, a 'dynamics of identity(ies)' that combines, in a dynamic and intense harmony, national/transnational designs and local demands. On the other hand, linguistic orality, both in its Brazilian version as a multiform monolingual structure and in its Indian version as a multilingual structure, favours a peaceful intrusion of dialogism into an otherwise well-demarcated sphere of textual literature, generating what I would call 'orality in written forms', which is very eloquently and consciously expressed in ancient, classic and contemporary forms of Indian literature and in contemporary narrative developments in Brazilian fictional narratives, particularly the so-called 'fantastic' genre, so magnificently represented by Guimarães Rosa's novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956).<sup>8</sup>

7 "Nunca fomos catequizados. [...] Fizemos Cristo nascer na Bahia" (de Andrade 1972: 11-12).

8 I particularly have in mind the specific Latin American developments of the 'fantastic' genre that, in Spanish America, became technically known as the *real maravilloso*. These developments reject the idea of fantasy and assume that the fantastic constitutes an obscure and deeper level of reality, often paradoxical, totalising, unexpected, terrible

#### IV.

It's against this complex backdrop of concurrent postcolonial strategies of creative/imaginative resistance, enacted through redefined versions of multiculturalism, linguistic orality and dynamic identities, that the exercise of cultural translation and effective communication between cultural realities as geographically and historically distant as Brazil and India becomes a viable and desirable proposition. Moreover, the pragmatic requirements of the many years I have taught Indian philosophies and religions in Brazil has made abundantly clear to me the unavoidable pedagogical necessity, in view of ensuring hermeneutical translatability, of resorting to conceptual frameworks of both occidental philosophies and religions and Brazilian and Latin American intellectual heritage.

In this context, it's important to locate, within the history of exchanges between the regions, intellectual projects that are somehow sensitive to the postcolonial potential of mutual benefit. My final remarks relate to three of those cases, the first of which has no specific awareness of those links: the oral tradition of the *Pañcatantra* in Brazil. The second developed, paradoxically, through the criticism of alleged Orientalism, namely from Brazil's greatest prose writer Machado de Assis. And the third resulted from a conscious partnership with India, namely by one of Brazil's major poets, Cecília Meireles.

Versions of several Indian fables of the *Pañcatantra*<sup>9</sup> (Viṣṇuśarma 1986) were transplanted to Brazil during the colonial and post-independence periods through a multitude of indirect textual and oral sources, and are now firmly rooted as part of Brazilian regional folk traditions (Cascudo 1956). While scrutinising them in the light of Indian original versions and also European trans-creations such as those of Jean de La Fontaine, it is amazing to find that the pragmatic and amoral posture that marks the Indian stories

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and transgressive. This is the context that prompts Günter Lorenz to compare Guimarães Rosa's work with that of Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges. He says: "Murder and violence, tenderness and incest, horror and phantasmagoric things (more dreadful and fantastic than Borges's and Cortázar's intellectual constructions) take turns, succeeding in creating a careful composition about events of hectic dramaticity" ("Assassinio e violência, ternura e incesto, horror e coisas fantasmagóricas (mais pavoroso e fantástico do que nas construções intelectuais de um Jorge Borges e Julio Cortázar) se revezam, criando o quadro de composição caprichoso de um acontecimento de febril dramaticidade") (Lorenz 2003: 378).

9 Famous compilation in Sanskrit of oral fable narratives.

seems to find a creative replication in the Brazilian versions as practical knowledge, despite the European moralising influences – such as Iberian oral traditions and La Fontaine’s ornamental poetry – which conditioned their journey to Brazil (Loundo 2003a: 174-177).

The second case is that of Machado de Assis, whose pioneering criticism of Cartesian and Enlightenment thinking and their fictional representations in Latin America – namely romanticist and realist narratives – had to wait decades to earn its well-deserved recognition. One of the recurrent aspects of his critique is precisely the ‘oriental’ paradoxes and exoticisms. Machado de Assis’s parody of the orientalisms dissolved in Brazilian culture (the reincarnation theory, the stereotyped references to Brahmanism and Buddhism) reflects, ultimately, the parody of the parody that Orientalism itself represents. Thus, in the peripheral spaces of Latin America, Machado de Assis undertook an unexpected deconstruction of the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism (Loundo 2007a: 42-49). And just like ‘the reverse of a reverse’ that straightens things, Machado de Assis’s critique finds a close proximity to genuine ideas and designs deeply rooted in the *Upaniṣad(s)* (1998) and Nagarjunian Buddhism (Nāgārjuna 1991). In fact, the existential apophatic path of Machado de Assis does not constitute a nihilist negation of the world (as the critique usually states), but a negation of existential ‘obsessions’ that dominate egocentric designs in the world (Loundo 2007a: 52-55). This unexpected convergence in anti-metaphysical postures between Machado de Assis and the Indian traditions of the *Upaniṣad(s)* and Mahāyāna Buddhism, reflects, above all, a major convergence of designs: the criticism, be it soteriological or fictional, sets in motion a narrative dialogical structure that aims to bring joy and happiness, rather than scepticism: “When we write a story, the spirit becomes joyful, and time flows easily and the narrative of one’s life ends up without one noticing it”<sup>10</sup> (Machado de Assis 1994 [1882]).

The third example relates to one of the greatest contemporary Brazilian poets, Cecília Meireles, whose philosophical leanings brought her close to India from the early years of her life. During the 1950s, she undertook a trip to India. In the diary that records her direct experiences on Indian soil, she repeatedly states that the multiple reality of India soon became a recurrent recollection of her own Brazil: “India goes on being for me,

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10 “Quando se faz um conto o espírito fica alegre, o tempo escoa-se, e o conto da vida acaba, sem a gente dar por isso”.

among thousands of other things, a serious personal longing” (Meireles 1999: 252). Could it be a matter of coincidence? This is highly unlikely, when the author herself acknowledges that her own standpoint as a Brazilian postcolonial subject was paramount for her understanding of Indian reality (Loundo 2007b: 160). In short, the spontaneous feeling of familiarity and intimacy and the quick apprehension of different cultural meanings lay, precisely, in a routine of cultural plurality imbibed in postcolonial designs of resistance and creative imagination. The translator – the plural, the ‘hybrid’, the multi-territorialised *ens* – is already there, everywhere, somehow, in potential form.

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